

REPORT

OF THE



MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE

LIVERPOOL SANITARY AMENDMENT ACT,

1864.

LIVERPOOL:

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REPORT.

The Medical Officer of Health has the honour to submit, for the consideration of the Committee, the following observations on the Act 27 and 28 Victoria, entitled "An act for making further provision with respect to the sanitary condition of the Borough of Liverpool, and for other purposes."

The preamble of the bill recites the provisions of acts now in force for surveying and remedying the condition of dangerous buildings, and for appointing a Medical Officer of Health. It then states, that there are in the borough a great number of houses situated in, or abutting upon, or contiguous to, or at the entrance of courts and alleys, which houses, by reason of defects in the construction thereof, or the want of ventilation or proper conveniences, or from other causes, are unfit for human habitation ; and fevers and other diseases are constantly generated there, causing death and loss of health, not only in the courts and alleys, but also in other parts of the borough ; and it is expedient that provision be made for the remedy thereof, and also that further provision be made for the regulation of courts and alleys in the borough, and of the houses and buildings erected therein.

Upon the facts contained in this preamble are based the enactments of the bill ; but before analysing them it will be convenient to state more fully the nature and extent of the structural and sanitary evils to be remedied.

There are in the Borough of Liverpool 3173 courts, of which only 542 have an entrance width of ten feet or more ; and if these be substraeted from the total, it will leave an enormous number of courts as coming, at least partially, within the meaning of the description in the preamble of the act, because of some radical defect in their construction impeding proper ventilation, and favoring thereby the generation and extension of disease. It is impossible to classify with strict accuracy all these unhealthy courts, since many have defects peculiar to themselves ; but the following arrangement will be found to embody, under notable characteristics, the greater proportion of them. It will assist, to group together under distinct heads an otherwise perplexing mass of facts, and

serve to indicate to some extent the features of the worst cases, the nature of alterations required, and the comparative facility with which they can be effected.

The first class comprises courts narrowed at their entrance by privies and middens. Of these there are three sub-divisions, according to the manner in which the court is closed at its end, viz.,—1, by buildings; 2, by a wall or privy separating the court from a street; 3, by a wall or privy separating it from another court.

The second class comprises courts narrowed at their entrance by houses. It admits of the same sub-divisions as the former.

The third class comprises courts covered or arched at their entrance, and it also has the same sub-divisions as the above.

In suggesting the proper plans for remedying the structural defects of these three classes of courts, a distinction must be drawn between those which have buildings at their end and those separated from a street or passage or other court by walls and privies. The former will require to be specially dealt with according to the circumstances of each case; but as to the latter, the Medical Officer considers that an effective melioration of sanitary evils may be obtained, at comparatively little cost, by the removal of impeding walls and privies, and by the purchase of a house, or other place, for the erection of proper conveniences. He therefore suggests that measures be at once taken to carry out improvements of this description, which will not only be of great present benefit, but also such as would form a part of any complete scheme. The Borough Engineer has undertaken to prepare plans illustrative of this mode of alteration.

The fourth class of courts is where one side is formed by the privies and middens of street houses opposite the doors and windows of houses forming the other side of the court. Here the remedy will be by the removal of the privies, and by making suitable arrangements for other conveniences. This class of cases may be also dealt with at once.

The fifth class of courts is where there are two entrances opening on different streets or passages. It has its sub-divisions according to the construction of the entrances—viz., 1, both entrances arched or covered; 2, both entrances open upwards; 3, one entrance arched, the other open.

The sixth class of courts comprises courts within courts intercommunicating, and has its sub-divisions according to the nature of the surrounding or adjoining premises or the peculiarity of the entrances, viz., 1, interlaced courts having only one common entrance from a street, the entrance being open or arched. 2, interlaced courts with two or several entrances; 3, series of courts surrounded by buildings.; 4, courts surrounded partly by buildings, partly abutting on streets or open spaces.

In many of the cases grouped under the fifth and sixth classes, inexpensive improvements, which will form part of any future complete scheme, might be at once undertaken.

The financial machinery by which the improvements contemplated by the act are to be carried out is limited to a penny in the pound on the rateable property of the borough—estimated at £6000 per annum, or a capitalised sum of £100,000. It will be thus seen, by a comparison between the means at a disposal of the Council and the work to be done, that the greatest prudence will be required in the management of the fund, so as to produce at the least cost of outlay the greatest benefit to the community. If complete reconstruction of courts on the perfect principles of sanitary requirements be attempted, it is evident that the money will be expended in very restricted localities, and that the benefits of amelioration will not be extended, as they otherwise might be, over a large area of unhealthy districts.

It is because the Medical Officer considers that more good will be obtained from the modified improvements of a great number of bad cases than from more perfect plans of alterations applied to a few, that he has ventured to suggest the desirability of at once grappling with what is clearly injurious and easily remediable. It will not impede action being taken in the instances of courts which, from being exceptionally narrow and close, are the fostering seats of prevailing contagious diseases. Both processes may proceed contemporaneously; but, as the worst courts are generally so surrounded by buildings as to render necessary either total destruction or extensive removal of premises, it is impossible for the Medical Officer to lay down any general rules for their treatment. Each case has its specific difficulties, and must necessarily form the subject of a separate report; but he purposes to deal at once with some of the most urgent of them. As proceedings, consequent on their being brought before the Grand Jury, will involve considerable expense—probably beyond the rate authorised to be levied—he will on all occasions, before making his report, confer with the Borough Engineer as to the best structural alterations to be adopted, and then submit the whole particulars to the Committee. He has, for the purpose of putting in force the powers of the act, already visited, with the Borough Engineer, the district of South Toxteth, which includes Mann-street, Robert-street, and Robertson-street, three of the most unhealthy localities of the borough, and he hopes within a week or ten days to be able to invite the Committee to accompany him in an inspection of those places, there on the spot to hear the suggestions of the Borough Engineer as to the best mode of effecting the required alterations. The sections No. 4 to No. 11 of the act prescribe the mode of procedure in reference to the Medical Officer of Health's Report, and the subsequent measures theron. Section 12 gives to the owner a right of appeal against the presentment of the Grand Jury. The remaining

sections provide the machinery for acquiring the property and carrying out the improvements. The powers given by the 27th and 28th Vic., chap. 72, in an act entitled "The Liverpool Improvement Act, 1864," have an important connection with the improvement of courts and alleys, as it withdraws the restriction which prevented the Council from requiring a privy to be provided for any house built before 1846, when the premises would be thereby interfered with. The Council have now the power to require proper convenience to be provided.

W. TRENCH.